

SENATE RECORD VOTE ANALYSIS

104th Congress
1st Session

Vote No. 408

September 11, 1995, 6:11 p.m.
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WELFARE REFORM BILL/Food Stamp Work Requirement

SUBJECT: Family Self-Sufficiency Act of 1995 . . . H.R. 4. Helms amendment No. 2523 to the Dole modified perfecting amendment No. 2280 to the committee substitute amendment.

ACTION: AMENDMENT REJECTED, 32-66

SYNOPSIS: As reported with a committee substitute amendment, H.R. 4, the Family Self-Sufficiency Act of 1995, will overhaul six of the Nation's ten largest welfare programs.

The Dole modified perfecting amendment would strike the provisions of the committee substitute amendment and insert in lieu thereof substitute provisions, entitled "The Work Opportunity Act of 1995."

The Helms amendment would deny food stamps to individuals who did not work at least 40 hours during the preceding 4-week period if those individuals were over the age of 18 and under the age of 55, were not parents residing with dependents under the age of 18, were mentally and physically fit, and were not responsible for the care of incapacitated individuals. One could meet the work requirement of this amendment by performing community service or work for a State or a political subdivision thereof through a program established by a State or a political subdivision thereof.

Those favoring the Helms amendment contended:

The Helms amendment would target a select group of food stamp recipients--adults in their prime working years who are mentally fit, physically fit, have no dependents, do not work, and receive food stamps. The fact that such food stamp recipients even exist illustrates why this Nation is nearly \$5 trillion in debt. The Helms amendment would require these deadbeats to work at least 10 hours per week or be denied food stamps. If they could not find private sector jobs, they would have to work in community service jobs.

Frankly, this requirement is ridiculously weak. In essence, all it would ask for in return for free food for a month is one 10-hour day of work per week. Further, it would only ask for this little bit of work from young men and women of sound mind and body and no dependents. Some of our colleagues have struggled mightily to portray this amendment as harsh, but their examples fall flat. For

(See other side)

YEAS (32)			NAYS (66)			NOT VOTING (2)	
Republicans (32 or 62%)	Democrats (0 or 0%)		Republicans (20 or 38%)	Democrats (46 or 100%)		Republicans (2)	Democrats (0)
Abraham	Kyl		Ashcroft	Akaka	Inouye	Gramm- ²	
Brown	Lott		Bennett	Baucus	Johnston	Simpson- ^{2AY}	
Coats	Mack		Bond	Biden	Kennedy		
Coverdell	McCain		Burns	Bingaman	Kerrey		
Craig	McConnell		Campbell	Boxer	Kerry		
Dole	Murkowski		Chafee	Bradley	Kohl		
Faircloth	Nickles		Cochran	Breaux	Lautenberg		
Frist	Pressler		Cohen	Bryan	Leahy		
Gorton	Roth		D'Amato	Bumpers	Levin		
Grams	Santorum		DeWine	Byrd	Lieberman		
Grassley	Shelby		Domenici	Conrad	Mikulski		
Gregg	Smith		Hatch	Daschle	Moseley-Braun		
Helms	Stevens		Hatfield	Dodd	Moynihan		
Hutchison	Thompson		Jeffords	Dorgan	Murray		
Inhofe	Thurmond		Kassebaum	Exon	Nunn		
Kempthorne	Warner		Lugar	Feingold	Pell		
			Packwood	Feinstein	Pryor		
			Snowe	Ford	Reid		
			Specter	Glenn	Robb		
			Thomas	Graham	Rockefeller		
				Harkin	Sarbanes		
				Heflin	Simon		
				Hollings	Wellstone		

EXPLANATION OF ABSENCE:

- 1—Official Business
- 2—Necessarily Absent
- 3—Illness
- 4—Other

SYMBOLS:

- AY—Announced Yea
- AN—Announced Nay
- PY—Paired Yea
- PN—Paired Nay

instance, some Senators have suggested that it would be unfair to workers who were laid off after years of labor if they could not find a new job within a month. However, such workers would not need a new job instantly to qualify for benefits as long as they performed community work while they were job hunting. They could volunteer to clean roadsides, put books back on library shelves, or perform any other similarly honest labor for a mere 10 hours per week and still receive food stamps. There is absolutely nothing onerous about this requirement. Similarly, some Senators have noted that pregnant women would also be required to work in order to receive food stamps. In response, we ask our colleagues how many working women do they know who stop work during pregnancy? If a pregnancy required a woman to remain in bed or otherwise incapacitated her, of course, she would by definition no longer be covered by the Helms amendment because she would not be physically fit to work, but in general, if all other women are able to continue working during pregnancy we should not assume that women on welfare are somehow more delicate.

One might suppose that we are talking about a very minor problem, because it is hard to believe that there are a large number of adults without dependents who refuse to work and who receive food stamps. One would be wrong. There are 2.5 million such recipients, and they must have voracious appetites from doing nothing all day because the Congressional Budget Office has estimated that passing the Helms amendment would result in 7-years savings of \$5.6 billion. All the Helms amendment would ask is that these recipients put in at least a day of work a week. We do not think it is asking too much, and are therefore pleased to vote for the adoption of the amendment.

Those opposing the amendment contended:

The Helms amendment is not sufficiently targeted. We emphatically second the intent of the amendment--to force deadbeats who have no excuse for not working to get jobs or get off food stamps--but the amendment would hit more than its target. For example, an individual who was laid off when a factory closed down in a small town could be out of work for months if nearly everyone else in town also worked at that factory and also found themselves unemployed. After 20 or 30 years of working hard at a job, such a factory worker should not be denied the right to eat just because there were suddenly no jobs left in town. Similarly, though the Helms amendment has some exemptions, it would deny a pregnant woman food stamps if she had not worked in the previous 30 days. A woman in such a condition should not be denied food for any reason. She might not deserve charity, but her unborn baby is not guilty of doing anything wrong and should not be denied.

The underlying Dole amendment, in contrast, would stop the abuse of the Food Stamp Program by able-bodied individuals without denying benefits for any deserving people. The Dole amendment would require non-elderly adults without dependents to work at least 6 months out of the most recent year or they would be kicked out of the program. With a 6-month time frame, the Dole amendment would give most people who really wanted to work the opportunity to find work before their food stamp benefits expired. However, in recognition of the fact that in some economically depressed areas 6 months might not be enough, the amendment would also give the Secretary of Agriculture the discretion to waive the requirement. We think the Dole amendment's approach is preferable to the approach taken by the Helms amendment. We therefore urge our colleagues to vote against the Helms amendment.